

and Ma Ull sat down to pick out a young ladies' culture-factory for her the process was simple. They discarded all but three of the catalogues, savin' them that was printed on the thickest paper and havin' the most halftone pictures, and then put the tag on the one where the rates was highest. Near Washington, I think it was; anyway, somewhere South,—board and tuition, two thousand dollars and up; everything extra, from lead pencils to lessons in court etiquette; and the young ladies limited to ten new evenin' dresses a term.

Maybe you've seen products of such exclusive establishments? And if you have perhaps you can frame up a faint picture of what Doris was like after four years at Hetherington Hall and a five months' trip abroad chaperoned by the Baroness Pareschi. No wonder she didn't find home a happy spot after that!

"Her brothers are quite nice, I believe," says Vee. "They're both married, though. Mr. Ull is not so bad, either,—a little crude perhaps; but he has learned to wear a frock coat in the shop and not to talk to lady customers when he has a cigar between his teeth. But Mrs. Ull—well, she hasn't kept up, that's all."

"Still on East 14th street, eh?" says I.

Vee admits that nearly states the case. "And of course," she goes on, "she doesn't understand Doris. They don't get on at all well. So when Doris told me how lonely and unhappy she was at home and begged me to visit her for a week in return—well, what could I do? I'm going back with her Monday."

"Then," says I, "I see where I can next Friday off the calendar."

"Unless," suggests Vee, droopin' her long eyelashes coy, "you were not too stupid to think of—"

"Say," I breaks in, "gimme that number again, will you? Suppose I could duck meetin' Westy if I came the first evenin'?"

"If you're at all afraid of him, you shouldn't run the risk," comes back Vee.

"Chance is my middle name," says I. "Only him—'takin' around does make a room so crowded. I didn't know but he might miss a night occasionally."

Vee sticks the tip of her tongue out. "Just two during the last ten days, if you want to know," says she.

"Huh!" says I. "Must think he holds a season ticket."

I couldn't make out, either, what it was that Vee seems so amused over; for as near as I can judge she was never very strong for Sappy her self. Maybe it was just a string she was handlin' me.

HAVIN' decided on that, I waits patient until eight-fifteen Monday evenin', and then breezes cheery and hopeful through the Ulls' front door and into the front room. No Westy in sight, or anybody else. The maid says the young ladies are in somewhere, and she'll tell 'em I've come.

So I wanders about amongst the furniture, that's set around almost as thick as in a show-room,—heavy, fancy pieces, most likely ones that had been sent up from the store as stickers. The samples of art on the walls struck me as a bit garly too, and I was tryin' to guess how it would seem if you had to live in that sort of clutter-continental, when out through the shinin' doors from the library appears Sappy the Countess.

"The poor prince!" thinks I. "I wonder if I've got time to work up some scheme of peetin' the kids under him?"

But instead of givin' me the haughty state as maid he rushes towards me smilin' and excited. "Oh, I say!" he breaks out. "Tachy, isn't it? Well, I—I've got a big piece of news."

"I know," says I. "Someone's told you that the Panama Canal's full of water."

"No, no!" says he. "It's—it's about me. Just happened, you know. And really I must tell someone."

I had a choke sensation in my throat about then, and my breath came a little short; but I managed to get out husky, "Well, toss it over."

Westy beams grateful. "Isn't it wonderful?" says he. "I—I've got her!"

"Eh?" I gasps, grippin' a chair back.

"She just told me," says he, "in there. She's—she's wearing my ring now."

Got me right under the belt buckle, that did. I felt wobbly and dizzy for a second, and I expect I gawps at him open faced. Then I takes a brace. Had to. I don't know how well I did it either, or how convincin'.



"A good deal of a queen she is too."

it sounded, but I found myself shakin' him by the mitt and sayin', "Congratulations, Westlake. You—you've got a girl worth gettin', believe me!"

"Thanks awfully, old man," says he, still pumpin' my arm up and down. "I can hardly realize it myself. Awfully bad case I had, you know. And now, while I have the courage, I suppose I'd best see her mother."

"Who-a-ut?" says I, starin' at him.

"I know," says he, "it isn't being done much nowadays, but somehow I think I ought. You know I haven't even met Mrs. Ull as yet."

I hope he was so fussed he didn't notice that sigh of relief I let out; for I'll admit it was some able-bodied affair,—a good deal like shakin' off the air in a brake connection, or rippin' a sheet. Anyway, I made up for it the next minute.

"You and Doris, eh?" says I, poundin' him on the back hearty. "Ain't you the foxy pair, though? Well, well! Here, let's have another shake on that. But why not see Father and tell him about it? Know the old gent, don't you?"

"Ye-es," says Westy, flusin' a bit. "But he—well, he's her father, of course. She can't help that. And it makes no difference at all to me if he isn't really refined—not a bit. But—but I'd rather not talk to him just now. I—I prefer to see Mrs. Ull."

I can't say just why I felt so friendly and fraternal to him about then; but I did. "Westy," says I, "take my advice about this bunch of yours to see Mother. Don't!"

"But really," he insists, "I must tell one of the other, don't you see. And unless I do it right away I know I never can at all. Besides I've made up my mind that Mrs. Ull ought to be the first to know. I—I'm going to ring for the maid and ask to see her."

"Good nerve!" says I, slappin' him on the shoulder. "In that case I'll just slip into the back room there and shut the door."

"Oh, I say!" says he, glancin' around panicky. "I—I wish you'd stay. I—I don't fancy facing her alone. Please stay!"

"It ain't reg'lar," says I.

"I don't care," says Westy, pleadin'. "You could sort of intrude me, you know, and—help me out if I get stuck. You would, wouldn't you?"

And it was amazin' how different I felt towards Westy from five minutes before. His best friend couldn't have looked on him kinder, or promised to stand by him closer. I calls the maid myself, discovers that Mrs. Ull is in the upstairs sittin' room, and sends the message that Mr. Westlake would like to see her right off about something important.

"But you got to buck up, my boy," says I. "For from all the dope I've had you've got a jolt comin' to you."

THAT wa'n't any life risin', either. He'd hardly begun peakin' restless in and out among the chairs and tables before we hears a heavy pad-pad on the stairs, and the next thing we know the lady is standin' in the door.

Not such an awful start old party as I'd looked for, nor she didn't have such a bad face; but with the funny way she has her hair bobbed up, and the weird way her dress fits her, like it had been cut out left-handed in a blind asylum—well, she's a mess, that's all. It's an expensive lookin' outfit too, and the jewelry display around her lumpy neck and on her pudgy fingers was enough to make you blink; but somehow it all looked out of place.

For a second she stands there fingerin' her rings fidgety, and then remarks unexpected, "It's about Doris, ain't it? Well, young feller, what is it you got on your mind?"

And all of a sudden I tumbles to the fact that she's lookin' straight at me. Then it was my turn to go panicky. "Excuse me, Ma'am," says I hasty, "but

that's the guilty party, the one over by the fireplace, Mr. Westlake, Ma'am."

"Oh!" says she. "That one, eh? Well, let's have it!"

and with that she paddles over to a high-backed, carved mahogany chair and settles herself sort of grim and defiant. I almost had to push Westy to the front too.

"I expect you've talked this all over with her father, eh?" she goes on. "I'm always the last to get wise to anything that goes on in this house, specially if it's about Doris. Come, let's have it!"

"But I haven't seen Mr. Ull at all," protests Westy. "It—it's just happened. And I thought you ought to know first. I want to ask you, Mrs. Ull, if I may marry Doris?"

We wa'n't lookin' for what came next, either of us; her big red face had such a hard, sullen look on it, like she knew we was sizin' her up and meant to show us she didn't give a hoot what we thought. But as Westy flinches and bows real respectful, holdin' out his hands friendly, the change come. The hard lines around her mouth softens, the narrowed eyes widen and light up, and her stiff under jaw gets trembly. A tear or so trickles foolish down the side of her nose; but she don't pay any attention. She's just starin' at Westy.

"You—you wanted me to know first, did you?" says she, with a break in her shrill, cackly voice. "Muh!"

"I thought it only right," says Westy. "You're Doris's mother, you know, and—"

"Good boy!" says she, reachin' out after one of his hands and patten' it. "I'm glad you did too. Doris she's got too fine for her old mother. That ain't so much her fault as it is mine, I expect. I'm kind of rough, and a good deal behind the times. I ain't kept up, not even the way Leo has. But then, I ain't had the chance. I've been at home, lookin' after the boys and—Doris. I saw she was gettin' spoiled; but I didn't have the heart to bring her home and stop it. She's young, though. She'll get over it. You'll help her. Oh, I know about you. Quite a young swell, you are; but I guess you're all right. And I'm glad for Doris. Maybe too she'll find out some day that her rough old mother, who got left so far behind, thinks a lot of her still. You—you'll tell her as much sometime perhaps. Won't you?"

Say, take it from me, I was so misty in the eyes about then, and so choky under my collar, that I couldn't have done it myself. But Westy did. There's a heap more to him than shows on the outside.

"Mrs. Ull," says he, "I shall tell Doris all of that, and much more. And I'm sure that both of us are going to be very fond of you. And if you don't mind, I'm going to begin now to call you Mother."

Yes, I was gettin' a little uneasy at that stage. I hadn't counted on bein' let in for quite such a close family scene. And when the two girls showed up with their arms locked about each other, and Vee leads Doris up to Mother Ull, and they goes to a three-cornered clinch, sabbin' on one another's shoulder—well, I felled.

ON the way home I was struck by a sudden thought that trickled all the way down my spine like a splinter of ice. "If I ever had the luck to get that fat," thinks I, "would I have to go through any such an act with Auntie? Hel-lus, Hubert! Hel-lus!"



"They goes to a three-cornered clinch."